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ABSTRACT

This research, although conducted in 1967, investigates whether speech characteristics of an individual have an influence on others' perceptions of how effective the person would be as either a school counselor or a school speech therapist. The research stemmed from assumptions that (1) speech characteristics of the counselor or therapist may well affect both the client's image of the counselor and the value of the counseling itself, and (2) an identification of speech characteristics that might influence client perceptions of counselor effectiveness would be valuable to counselor-therapist educators and to counselor-therapists engaged in professional practice. Twenty male counselors-in-training recorded a phonetically balanced reading passage, and 96 undergraduate students listened to the recordings and predicted how effective they believed each speaker would be as a counselor or therapist. The listeners were also asked both to identify and rank-order the speech characteristics which had influenced their judgment. The data indicated that (1) the students were in general agreement about how effective each of the speakers would be as a therapist (either a counselor or speech therapist), and (2) the vocal characteristics associated with predictions of effectiveness were either a good vocal stresspattern, a good speaking rate, good articulation, or a combination of these factors. (Author)

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INFLUENCE OF SPEECH CHARACTERISTICS ON JUDGED "THERAPIST" EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

The reported research, conducted in 1967, was designed to investigate whether the speech characteristics of an individual have an influence on others' perceptions of how effective the person would be as either a school counselor or a school speech therapist. The research stemmed from assumptions that (1) speech characteristics of the counselor or therapist may well affect both the client's image of the counselor and the value of the counseling itself, and (2) an identification of speech characteristics that might influence client perceptions of counselor effectiveness would be valuable to counselor-therapist educators and to counselors-therapists engaged in professional practice.

The procedure used to collect data was to have 20 male counselors-in-training record a phonetically balanced reading passage and to have 96 undergraduate students listen to the recordings and predict how effective they believed each speaker would be as a counselor or therapist. The listeners were also asked to both identify and rank-order the speech characteristics which had influenced their judgment.

The data indicated that (1) the students were in general agreement about how effective each of the speakers would be as a therapist (either a counselor or speech therapist), and (2) the vocal characteristics associated with predictions of effectiveness were either a good vocal stress pattern, a good speaking rate, good articulation, or a combination of these factors.

Sample instructions to research participants, rating scales, and definitions of the speech characteristics to be rated are included in the appendix.

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INFLUENCE OF SPEECH CHARACTERISTICS ON JUDGED "THERAPIST" EFFECTIVENESS

Purpose

A review of the literature, e.g. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7), indicates that there has been considerable discussion concerning the manner in which the personality of the counselor and the therapeutic conditions provided by the counselor affect the counseling encounter. These factors may well be of primary importance in a therapeutic effort. However, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that some physical characteristic of the counselor may also affect the client's perception of the counselor and the counseling encounter, especially in the early or formative stages of the relationship. Further, since a large proportion of interviews contain considerable verbal interaction, it would not seem unreasonable to assume that the speech characteristics of the counselor might well affect both the client's image of the counselor and the value of the counseling itself.

This paper reports the results of a study which was undertaken to examine whether the speech characteristics of an individual influenced students' perception of the "desirability" or "effectiveness" of the individual to serve as a counselor. The objective of the study was to identify several aspects of vocal behavior which appeared to be most influential in shaping college students' judgment of how effective an individual would be as a school counselor or a school speech therapist.

Procedure

The procedure used in the research was to ask 20 male counselors-in-training at the University of Alabama to tape-record a 180-word phonetically balanced reading passage. The passage that was recorded is shown in Appendix A. The students were not informed of the purposes of the tape recordings nor were they instructed to read in any particular manner. The readers ranged in age from 20 to 50 years and represented several geographic areas of the United States.

Ninety-six undergraduate students from the University of Alabama who were enrolled in either beginning speech courses (n=48) or introductory education courses (n=48) participated in the research. In general, the students were asked to listen to the recordings and, considering the speech behavior of the speaker, predict how effective they felt the speaker would be as a school counselor or school speech therapist. More specifically, in order to determine whether the students tended to see certain voice characteristics as being desirable or undesirable for either counselors or speech therapists, 24 education students and 24 speech students were asked to respond to each of the 20 recordings and to predict how effective they felt the reader (speaker) would be as a school speech therapist and the remaining 24 education and 24 speech students were asked to predict how effective they felt each of the recorded readers would be as a school counselor.

The students were instructed to listen to each speaker and to respond to an instrument which had been constructed for use in this study. They responded by indicating on a 7-point scale how effective they felt the speaker would be as a counselor (or therapist), by rank-ordering three of

seven selected aspects of vocal behavior which had most influenced their rating, and by providing an open-ended response explaining what they had liked or disliked about the vocal characteristics which had influenced their judgment of how effective the speaker would be. The seven vocal characteristics which were to be considered by the students were: articulation, speaking rate, voice quality, stress pattern, loudness level, pitch level, and regional accent. Appendix B contains a sample of the rating instruments, rating instructions, and definitions of the seven vocal characteristics.

Data Analysis

Since one group of 48 students was asked to predict each of the 20 speaker's effectiveness as a school counselor and one group of 48 students was asked to predict each of the speaker's effectiveness as a school speech therapist, relative frequencies of the two groups assigning "high" and "low" ratings to the different speakers were compared. The comparisons were made by subjecting the relative frequencies of the two groups which had assigned either high or low ratings to a chi-square test of differences between proportions. The 20 comparisons produced only one statistically significant difference between the two groups. This may have been a chance difference, however, since the probability of one difference occurring by chance in 20 comparisons is relatively high. It appears then that the two groups tended to agree with respect to their judgment of a speaker's effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) as either a speech therapist or a school counselor, i.e., a speaker predicted by one group of 48 students as being "high" in effectiveness as a speech

therapist was predicted by the other group as being "high" in effectiveness as a school counselor.

For each of the twenty recordings, the data were also analyzed to determine if the proportion of the 48 students selected from the speech courses who had predicted that a speaker would be either high or low in effectiveness differed from the proportion of the 48 students enrolled in education courses who had given similar predictions. The 20 tests of differences between proportions yielded no significant differences. This statistical analysis indicated that individuals enrolled in education courses and individuals enrolled in speech courses tended to agree in their predictions of the therapeutic effectiveness (or desirability) of the speakers.

The listeners' responses to the five speakers who had received the highest overall predictions of effectiveness and to the five speakers who had received the lowest overall predictions were examined in an attempt to identify the vocal characteristics which seemed to be associated with either high or low predictions of effectiveness. The examination of the participants' responses yielded the following information:

1) For the five highest rated speakers there was strong (approximately 80%) agreement among the students as to which speech characteristics had influenced their ratings. Of these five speakers, four were described by the students as having a good stress pattern and good articulation. The other speaker was described as also having a good stress pattern, moderately good articulation, and a good speaking rate.

2) For the five speakers receiving the lowest overall ratings of effectiveness, there was a similar level of agreement between the groups of students with respect to the speech characteristics of the speakers which had influenced their ratings. Of these five speakers, all five were described by the students as having a poor speaking rate and/or poor articulation.

Summary and Discussion

A review of the literature indicated that while there had been some agreement about personality characteristics that seem to lend themselves to promoting effective therapeutic encounters, there is limited information about which speech characteristics might influence the effectiveness of such encounters. Therefore, the research was conducted in an attempt to determine whether certain voice characteristics influenced entering college students' judgments of how effective a speaker would be as either a school counselor or a school speech therapist.

The analysis of the data indicated that there was strong agreement among the students with respect to (1) their judgment of how effective a particular speaker would be as a therapist (either as a school counselor or speech therapist), and (2) which speech characteristics influenced their judgment. There was general agreement that the factors which influenced the students' predictions of whether a speaker would be either a relatively effective or ineffective therapist were the quality of a speaker's stress pattern and either speaking rate or articulation.

The research reported here has certain limitations, one of which is that while the attempt was made to administer the recordings in a random

order, this can never be completely assured and some students may have tended to rate a moderately good speaker, who had been preceded by one or more poor speakers, as being very good. Another limitation might be that certain voice characteristics may not be independent, e.g., the characteristic of articulation may be more noticeable if a speaker speaks at a relatively slow rate of speed. Further, students from different geographic areas may not agree on "desirable" speech characteristics.

While perhaps the greatest limitation lies in the fact that the students were asked to perform the exceedingly difficult task of predicting an individual's effectiveness as a therapist solely from hearing the individual read a rather short passage, the students responses strongly suggested that there are certain identifiable speech characteristics that have an effect on judgments of how effective an individual would be as a counselor/therapist. Undoubtedly, there are a variety of factors existing in face-to-face encounters that would influence a client's perception of the effectiveness of the counselor; however, it is quite possible that both counselor/therapist educators and practitioners are underestimating the effect of speech characteristics on the therapeutic encounter, particularly initial encounters.

The research reported here can be considered as an exploratory investigation of whether, and the extent to which, speech characteristics of counselors might influence the client's image of the effectiveness of the counselor or therapist. The research is presented with the belief that certain voice characteristics have an influence on the therapeutic relationship, that there is some indication that "desirable" voice

characteristics can be identified, and that the effect of counselors' speech characteristics on the therapeutic relationship is sufficiently important to warrant further consideration and investigation.

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APPENDIX A

Arthur, The Young Rat

Once, a long time ago, there was a young rat named Arthur who could never make up his flighty mind. Whenever his swell friends used to ask him to go out to play with them, he would only answer airily, "I don't know." He wouldn't try to say yes, or no either. He would always shrink from making a specific choice.

His proud Aunt Helen scolded him: "Now, look here," she stated, "no one is going to aid or care for you if you carry on like this. You have no more mind than a stray blade of grass."

That very night there was a big thundering crash and in the foggy morning some zealous men--with twenty boys and girls--rode up and looked closely at the fallen barn. One of them slipped back a broken board and saw a squashed young rat, quite dead, half in and half out of his hole. Thus, in the end the poor shirker got his just dues. Oddly enough his Aunt Helen was glad. "I hate such oozy, oily sneaks," said she.

Appendix B

NAME _____ SEX: M F (Circle one)

BIRTHDATE _____

CLASS STANDING: (CIRCLE ONE) Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

MAJOR FIELD _____ MINOR _____

COURSE NAME AND NUMBER _____

_____

_____

PLEASE DO NOT FILL IN THIS SPACE

Order Number _____ Date _____

School _____ Task T C

_____

_____

INSTRUCTIONS:

You are going to be listening to a number of tape-recorded readings made by students training to be school counselors. On the basis of the person's speech behavior on the reading passage, you will be asked to predict how effective you think the reader would be as a school counselor. Use the following scale to indicate your prediction of the reader's effectiveness as a school counselor. CIRCLE THE SCALE POINT WHICH INDICATES YOUR PREDICTION.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all effective			Moderately effective			Highly effective

We are interested in knowing what aspects of a reader's speech behavior influence your over-all judgment of his effectiveness as a school counselor. Therefore, we would like you to examine the 7 aspects of speech behavior

below and decide which three contributed most to your prediction of the reader's effectiveness as a school counselor.

Place the number 1 beside the factor which you feel influenced your rating most; place a 2 beside the factor which you considered next in importance in your prediction; and place a 3 beside the factor which ranked third in your prediction of the reader's effectiveness as a school counselor. We are aware that several of the behaviors listed might have influenced your rating, but please rank order only the three most important factors in your rating.

For the three aspects you have indicated as being most influential in your prediction, above, check the column next to the factor which calls upon you to indicate whether the factor affected you favorably or unfavorably. Then, in the space provided, write a brief statement telling in your own words what you liked or disliked about the aspect of speech you ranked as 1, 2, or 3.

An example is given below:

Speaker Number 4

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all effective			Moderately effective			Highly effective

Rank	Aspect	Favorable	Unfavorable	Comments
3	Articulation	X		Made his sounds very clearly. Easy to understand.
2	Speaking rate	X		Talked nice and slow. Easy to keep up with him.
	Voice quality			

(sample rating sheet continued on next page)

Rank	Aspect	Favorable	Unfavorable	Comments
	stress pattern			
1	Loudness level		X	Talked too loud. Sounded like he was yelling.
	Pitch level			
	Regional dialect or accent			

So that you may have a clear understanding of what each aspect of speech you are asked to consider means, we have provided the following definitions. Please feel free to refer to the definitions when you are rank ordering the three aspects which you felt most influenced your judgment of the speaker's effectiveness as a school counselor.

1. Articulation - refers to how a person produced the sounds in a word. For example, a person who says thithter for sister is misarticulating the s sound; if he says wed for red, he is misarticulating the r sound. Good articulation involves saying all of the sounds necessary in a word without omitting, distorting or substituting any of the sounds.
2. Speaking rate - refers to how rapidly or slowly a person talks most of the time.
3. Voice quality - is the feature of one's voice that makes it possible to tell one person from another. This is what makes it possible, for example, to recognize a friend's voice on the telephone. Some kinds of voice quality which are considered abnormal have been called "breathy" (such as that of Marilyn Monroe or Jayne Mansfield), "hoarse," "too nasal", "not nasal enough" (as a person might sound when he has a head cold),

"harsh", etc.

4. Stress pattern - this feature lends interest and emphasis to what the speaker says. It refers to how the person raises or lowers his voice tones or changes his loudness or rate on certain syllables or words, so you understand what the speaker means. A speaker's stress pattern can tell you whether he is making a statement, asking a question, or making an exclamation. It can also tell you how the speaker feels about what he's saying (excited, disgusted, happy, neutral, angry, sad, etc.).
5. Loudness level - refers to how easy or difficult it is for the average listener to hear what the speaker is saying.
6. Pitch level - refers to the highness or lowness of the tones the speaker most often uses. For example, most women speak at higher pitch levels than men, but some women speak higher or lower than other women; the same thing is true for men.
7. Regional dialect or accent - refers to differences in vocal behavior that are common to certain parts of a state or region of the country. For example, in the Southern states, some people are said to have a "Southern drawl or accent" while in New England, people speak with a "nasal twang" (such as the way President John Kennedy spoke).

Speaker Number _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all effective			Moderately effective			Highly effective

Rank	Aspect	Favorable	Unfavorable	Comments
	Articulation			
	Speaking rate			
	Voice quality			
	Stress pattern			
	Loudness level			
	Pitch level			
	Regional dialect or accent			